

A WEEK in which the Central Intelligence Agency fall out publicly with the State Department and crosses swords privately with the Pentagon, in which the State Department and the Pentagon are quarrelling behind the scenes, and in which the White House reverses itself within 24 hours is a confusing one indeed.

The silly season is, of course, in full spate with the President occupied on the golf course at his summer retreat on the West Coast, but contrary to received opinion it is not only journalists who manufacture news—in Washington politicians and civil servants have reduced it to a fine art.

The outsiders

The confusion began last Monday at a background lunch organised by ABC's diplomatic correspondent for a select group of his colleagues at which Mr Richard Helms, director of the CIA, was the guest of honour. Mr Helms told an intriguing story of how Russia had been sounding out its East European satellites as to what their reaction would be to a Soviet pre-emptive strike on China's nuclear plants.

An implausible story on the face of it, but so good was the source that the next day the "Washington Post" ran the

America makes it a week of news confusion

From ADAM RAPHAEL, Washington, August 31

story prominently on its front page, attributing it to intelligence reports.

All would perhaps have been well, but unfortunately, as in London, there is an "outer circle" of diplomatic correspondents who had not been invited to the lunch, among them those of the "Washington Evening Star," the Scripps-Howard chain, and in particular the "New York Times," whose relationships with the CIA for some time have not been of the best.

When they eventually picked the story up from the early edition, they felt under no obligation to protect Mr Helms whom they named as the source. The next day, the Secretary of State, Mr Rogers, annoyed that the CIA leak might prejudice the US neutral stand towards the Russia-

Chinese conflict, let it be known that he thought very little of the report.

The Monday lunch also prompted one other highly contentious story which, for reasons unknown, did not surface until Friday. This was the CIA's defence, complete with facts, figures, and dates to the charges that it had been implicated in the death of Thai Khac Chuyen, the Vietnamese double agent whom eight Green Beret Special Forces officers are alleged to have murdered.

Significantly, the report said the CIA had decided to give its defence because it was annoyed with General Creighton Abrams, Commander of United States Forces in Vietnam, and the Secretary of the Army, Mr Resor, for refusing to issue a statement exonerat-

ing the agency from all blame.

The third clash of the week, this time between the State Department and the Pentagon, followed a speech in Madison, Wisconsin, on Tuesday night by the former Secretary of State, Mr Dean Rusk, who claimed that the latest intelligence reports showed that there was "an almost total lack" of infiltration of North Vietnamese troops into the South. Rusk tried to keep these optimistic remarks "off the record," but unsuccessfully, for the next day the "Washington Post" carried his speech prominently.

Discrepancy

Whether out of loyalty to a former chief or genuine conviction, Mr Robert McCloskey, the State Department's chief spokesman next day supported Rusk's observation, saying that the department regarded the reduction in infiltration as "significant" and as a very hopeful sign.

Within 24 hours, however, the Pentagon countered with a statement saying that the decrease in infiltration was so slight that no significance could be read into it. When the discrepancy between the two statements was pointed out, there was silence for some hours from the two departments until eventually a compromise statement was fudged which clarified nothing.